

3700 Venango Ave.
Munhall, PA. 15120
May 20, 1999

Ms. Jane Henney, M.D.
Commissioner, FDA
5600 Fishers Land
Rockville, MD 20857

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Dear Dr. Henney:

I understand that the June 27, 1999 issue of the Lancet pointed out that the antibiotic of last resort, vancomycin, has been discovered in commercial chicken feed by University of Maryland scientists. Clearly, the major chemical companies are threatening our future welfare by increasing the use of antibiotics in the foodchain. I personally don't want to increase my resistance, and will eat chicken rarely, if ever, in the years to come, and with great concern--unless it is free-range.

The purpose of your office is to protect the food-chain, not to pander to strong agricultural and chemical PACs. I understand a coalition of nearly 100 scientists and consumer, health and environmental groups petitioned the FDA in March for stronger guidelines which would deny the approval of antibiotics for animal use if the same drug is used to treat infections in humans. I would hope the FDA would be leading this fight, rather than forcing health groups to ban together to try to strengthen weak regs proposed by the FDA.

I enclose a salient news article entitled "Making News" from Mothers and Others' Green Guide of May, 1999. It is now very hard near the City of Pittsburgh to buy organic foods; I typically have to shop 15 miles away from my home to buy organic milk free from RGBH--a 30 mile round trip. The lax standards and industrial coopting of our government regs are making it harder and harder for a person interested in purchasing healthy foodstuffs to do so.

Please condemn the use of antibiotics used in humans for use in poultry and other animals and in their feed.

Yours truly,


Frances E. Harkins

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MAKING NEWS

ANTIBIOTIC RESISTANT "SUPER-BUGS"

Bacteria resistant to multiple antibiotics, including vancomycin — considered the antibiotic of last resort — have been discovered in commercial chicken feed by University of Maryland scientists. This "raises disturbing questions" about the potential spread of vancomycin-resistant strains into the food system in the U.S. and the risk of transfer of resistance to humans, the authors of the study wrote in the February 27, 1999 issue of Lancet.

As much as half of the antibiotics sold in the U.S. are used in factory livestock production to promote growth and prevent the outbreak of disease. But from 40% to 80% of this use is unnecessary, the National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine reported in 1998. Of particular concern: Six of the 17 classes of antibiotics used as animal growth promoters are also used to treat human illnesses.

More than one-third of strains of Staphylococcus aureus — the number one cause of post-surgical infections — are already resistant to vancomycin. And a third of all salmonella infections are no longer vulnerable to older antibiotics such as penicillin and tetracycline. "Vancomycin-resistant enterococcus, a bacteria found in the feed study, is virtually untreatable," says Rebecca Goldberg, Ph.D., a senior scientist at the Environmental Defense Fund. Repeated exposure to antibiotics permits the development and proliferation of resistant strains.

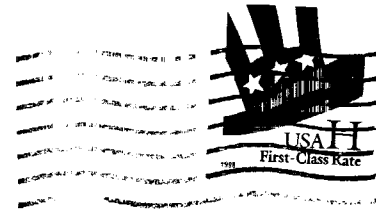
In January, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) proposed revised guidelines for livestock antibiotics. But a coalition of almost 100 scientists and consumer, health and environmental groups petitioned FDA in March for stronger guidelines which would deny approval of antibiotics for animal use if the same drug is used to treat infections in humans.

To support the petition, write to Jane Henney, M.D., Commissioner, FDA, 5600 Fishers Lane, Rockville, MD 20857. For more information contact Center for Science in the Public Interest, 1875 Connecticut Ave. NW #300, Washington, DC 20009, www.csplinet.org.

[Lancet, 2/27/99; New York Times, 1/27/99, 2/26/99, 3/8/99; World Watch, March/April 1999; CSPI News Release, 3/9/99]

Illustrations: Alexis Spakoski

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